

COLORADO INTERAGENCY COORDINATING COUNCIL  
FOR TRANSPORTATION ACCESS AND MOBILITY

*STATEWIDE STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN  
DECEMBER 2005*

BACKGROUND

Human services transportation refers to transportation provided to the transportation disadvantaged—that is, the elderly, disabled, low income and persons with other special transportation needs. It refers to transportation whether it is door-to-door, demand response service offered by human service organizations or traditional fixed route transit offered by public transit agencies.

There are at least 62 different federal programs that fund human services transportation, and a myriad of public, private non-profit and commercial operators that deliver that service. As a result, there is a great potential for service overlap and duplication. Some experts have observed that those involved in human services transportation, whether at the funding or operational level, do not communicate enough or may miss opportunities to share resources.

In many communities access to human service transportation can be difficult and/or confusing, with availability often dependent on the purpose of one's trip, one's place of residence, or a variety of other factors. In many communities there is not "one-stop shopping" when it comes to accessing transportation services. In many places there are "stove pipe" programs for serving people individually, based on the source of funding and its particular eligibility criteria.

Colorado state government. It is important to note that Colorado is a "local government state." It has one of the lowest levels of state taxation in the nation and, conversely, one of the higher levels of local taxation. Many human services programs are offered through the Colorado Department of Human Services but are delivered by county departments of human services. The state delegates a high degree of authority to those local departments. In other words, Colorado takes a "bottom up" approach to governance. This might seem to present a problem, insofar as the state cannot easily make statewide policy and procedural changes. On the other hand, one could argue that there could be a higher level of buy-in to changes from the local level when local officials have had an active and meaningful role in developing solutions. There can be fewer complaints about the state trying a "one size fits all" approach. In Colorado, state government is unlikely to propose a strong, "top down" approach, but it can nonetheless play an important role by offering incentives to local governments and organizations on a competitive basis, addressing state-level barriers, and involving local governments throughout the process.

Colorado has been well poised to undertake a coordination effort because of its previous efforts. In the mid 1990s, the state formed a Human Services Transportation Coordinating Council. That council oversaw a consultant project that examined the status of human services transportation and recommended ways to improve it. That effort was helpful in improving collaboration in Colorado and identifying a few barriers to coordination. That effort suffered from a lack of a dedicated facilitator, the lack of adequate executive level buy-in, and the failure to consider major institutional changes, such as the blending of funding streams. It is believed the current effort will be more successful because of a higher level of collaboration, an executive level buy-in, a dedicated facilitator for the process, and a more comprehensive review of potential solutions.

Colorado partners. Colorado's commitment to a United We Ride (UWR) effort has also been aided by the early grassroots efforts of an informal public/private group that was formed to address issues of coordination and service improvement. This group consists of the state transit association, advocacy groups, state agencies, local transportation providers, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and two non-profit foundations-- Rose Community Foundation and HealthONE Alliance. This group has been strongly advocating that Colorado participate in the United We Ride program so that a high-level group could recommend ways to improve the human services transportation network in the state. Colorado has essentially converted this grassroots effort into its current United We Ride project.

Consumer input and involvement, including through advocacy organizations, has been and will continue to be an important part of coordinating efforts in Colorado. An early step in the HealthONE Alliance and Rose Community Foundation initiative was a Transportation Summit for the Denver/Boulder metro area in October 2000. More than 300 consumers, advocates and providers participated and identified transportation issues and problems.

Another important planning initiative directly involving consumers was the Community Action for Transportation Solutions (CATS) led by Easter Seals Colorado and the Colorado Mobility Coalition in 2003 and 2004. As part of the needs assessment, 7,500 surveys were distributed through serving people with disabilities and an employer advocacy group for persons with disabilities. The survey asked how people with disabilities get to and from work, school, medical and other appointments, recreational or other activities and shopping, and what specific problems they encounter.

#### Interagency Council—Members, Purpose and Process

Governor Owens created the Colorado Interagency Coordinating Council for Transportation Access and Mobility in the summer of 2005 in response to the federal United We Ride initiative to improve coordination of human services transportation activities at the federal, state and local levels. The governor

named the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) as lead agency and invited representatives from a full range of key stakeholder groups to participate on the council, including local, state and federal government agencies; transportation providers; and non-profit organizations, including representatives of persons with disabilities, seniors, nursing homes, and transit agencies. Education, human services, transportation, veterans, and workforce development agencies are all members of the council. (See attached Interagency Council Roster.)

The council's purpose is to complete phase I of the state's strategic planning process, as follows:

- Assess the status of transportation coordination in Colorado;
- Examine possible ways of addressing coordination;
- Improve communication among organizations providing and funding human services transportation; and
- Develop a strategic action plan for the next steps to be taken to improve coordination.

This council is responsible for completing phase I of the state's strategic planning process. This phase and the existing council are scheduled to end no later than the summer of 2006.

The council's planning process includes:

- Pre-meeting consultant interviews with council members
- Multiple facilitated meetings of the council
- Survey of council members regarding priorities, actions, strategies, and benefits to be achieved
- Review of "Analysis of Colorado's Human Service and Public Transportation Networks" and the "Coordinating Transportation in Colorado: A Practitioner's Guidebook" (Fall 2005).

The analysis and practitioner's guide were prepared by a consultant firm (Nelson/Nygaard) as part of the Getting There Collaborative, a transportation initiative of the HealthONE Alliance and Rose Community Foundation, two major Colorado foundations, in support of the state's United We Ride coordination initiative.

Funding for the strategic planning process came from a \$35,000 United We Ride planning grant, from other CDOT federal planning funds, and approximately \$70,000 spent for research and analysis by HealthONE Alliance and Rose Community Foundation.

Colorado's UWR efforts have been aided by the fact that it hired a consultant firm (The Adams Group, Denver) to facilitate and coordinate the council's work. The Adams Group has significant experience in this type of work. Efforts have also been bolstered by collaboration with Nelson/Nygaard, the consultant firm that

conducted the Getting There Collaborative research for the two foundations. That firm has made presentations to the council and helped in a variety of other ways.

## ASSESSMENT OF THE STATUS OF COORDINATION

Through pre-meeting consultant interviews with members and council deliberations using the United We Ride Framework for Action (FFA) self-assessment tool for states, the council assessed the current status of coordination in Colorado.

Council members identified a number of positive factors. For example:

- The governor's creation of the interagency council;
- The enthusiastic engagement of the council members in the planning effort;
- The significant involvement and financial commitment of two leading Colorado foundations;
- An existing interagency process of CDOT in which four other state agencies evaluate applicants for Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) funding; and
- Several successful coordinating partnerships and brokerages at the local/regional level around the state.

Overall, the council determined that coordination efforts either "needed substantial action" or "needs to begin", at least at the state level, in the six areas described in the FFA. (See attached Framework for Action: Overall State Self-Assessment.) Some examples of factors that need to be addressed include:

- Gaps in the information available at the state and local levels;
- The absence of a formal mechanism to disseminate existing information;
- The absence of state funding for public transportation;
- The lack of state funding human services transportation services;
- Recent drastic cuts in Medicaid funding for transportation; and
- The absence of technology solutions being used to design and manage coordinated transportation systems

## STATE PRIORITIES AND ACTION STEPS

The council utilized the FFA self-assessment, a web-based survey of council members, and the findings and recommendations of the Getting There Collaborative report to develop this strategic action plan. The adopted action steps focus on actions to be taken over the next 12 to 18 months with the understanding that additional priorities and other long-term actions will be identified during that 12- to 18-month period, as will identifying responsible parties, timelines, and benchmarks.

In addition, the council adopted two key principles to govern the state's coordination efforts. Rural and urban appropriateness needs to be considered in developing state policies and programs. And, the needs of all consumer groups need to be met, such as the disabled community, including mentally ill consumers, and individuals in nursing homes and other institutional settings.

The top strategic priorities are:

- Create a framework for state and local/regional coordination, including providing local areas the tools they need to develop local human services transportation plans and partnerships;
- Create a state implementation structure that promotes accountability and sustainability to implement the strategic plan;
- Gather information, beyond that gathered by the Getting There Collaborative report and the Transit Element plans developed by the 15 transportation regions across the state, relative to transportation resources throughout the state;
- Establish efficient and effective information dissemination mechanisms to provide information to funders, providers, consumers, local governments, and policymakers; and
- Identify and address state and federal barriers to coordination and efficient provision of transportation services.

#### Creating Bi-Level State-Local Coordination Framework

The council recognizes that both state and local coordination are critical to achieving a more efficient and effective human services transportation system that meets the needs of consumers across the state. Council members emphasize the importance of these two levels working together, understanding that Colorado has strong locally driven control, is dependent on significant local funding, and must meet diverse needs across the state.

Action steps:

1. Create a task force, including state and local government representatives and other knowledgeable stakeholders, to develop specific recommendations regarding a state-regional/local framework for human transportation coordination throughout the state. Recommendations would include local coordinating entities (e.g. councils), regional/local geographic boundaries, state and local/regional roles and responsibilities, funding and tools needed by local/regional entities to develop and implement local plans. It is critical that the framework accommodate the diverse needs of communities and regions across the state. The framework would incorporate an existing governance framework in Colorado rather than

add a new layer to an already complicated transportation planning process.

Lead = Governor's Office with encouragement from current interagency coordinating council

2. Develop communication and advocacy strategies to gain support for the task force recommendations at the state and local levels.  
Lead = Lead state coordination agency and interagency council with support of task force members
3. Encourage the creation and development of coordinating councils at the local level by providing consultant assistance and other resources. Establish a program to provide pilot funding for local councils on a competitive basis.  
Lead= Interagency council

#### State Implementation Structure, Accountability, and Sustainability

The federal Framework for Action states that a driving factor for success is, "The governor and state officials serve as a catalyst for envisioning, organizing, and sustaining a coordinated system that provides mobility and access to transportation for all who need it." A review of best practices in other states that have successfully improved coordination indicate that designating a lead agency with adequate resources, instituting a permanent state level interagency coordinating council, and entering into interagency agreements help propel and sustain efficient and effective coordination efforts ("Analysis of Colorado's Human Service and Public Transportation Networks").

The council also identified these issues as critical components of the state's coordination plan. It believes that the designated lead agency could be an existing agency or newly established office, and would need a minimum of one FTE in this initial phase. The interagency council could be an extension of the life of the current council or a newly formed group and could be created by administrative action or executive order.

#### Action steps:

4. Provide consultant support to the lead state agency in order to focus the effort and reduce the burden on the lead state agency.  
Lead = Governor's Office and lead agency, with encouragement of current coordinating council
5. Create a permanent state interagency coordinating council with a strong tie to department and agency executives.  
Lead = Governor and/or state legislature with encouragement from current coordinating council

### Information Gathering

The Getting There Collaborative report and guidebook have consolidated a significant body of critical information, including funding, transportation networks and services, and demographic trends in various regions across Colorado and statewide, as well as best practices in other states and related findings and recommendations for Colorado. The Transit Element plans for the 15 Transportation Planning Regions (TPRs) across the state also provide significant information regarding services and estimated needs. However, there are still some gaps in the data and information needed to identify the needs of various groups of consumers; improve state laws, policies and programs; and develop state and local plans, among other activities.

#### Action steps:

6. Work with stakeholders, including consumers and consumer representatives, across the state and the Getting There Collaborative consulting team to identify data and information gaps.  
Lead = State interagency council
7. Develop plan to gather data and information identified in action step 4, potentially including a survey of communities across the state, and begin implementing data gathering as outlined in that plan. The plan should incorporate ways to regularly access customer input, such as the summit and survey described on page 2.  
Lead = State interagency council with support from lead agency and consultant team

### Communications and Information Dissemination

Much information and data is available at the local or state level, but its existence is often not known or is otherwise unavailable to agencies, providers, advocacy organizations and consumers who need it. In addition, stakeholders, i.e., elected officials and executive level policymakers, must be routinely informed regarding human services transportation issues and progress in order to assist in continued high level knowledge and support for implementation of the strategic action plan.

#### Action steps:

8. Provide a briefing at a joint meeting of the executive directors of participating state departments on this strategic plan.  
Lead = State representatives on current state interagency council

9. Provide briefings to Colorado Counties Inc., Colorado Municipal League, and other policymakers  
Lead = Members of the current state interagency council and lead state coordination agency staff
10. Create a human services transportation information clearinghouse, a shared transportation coordination web site that includes publications, links to relevant information, policies, and programs.  
Lead = Lead state coordination agency
11. Include UWR coordination as a regular topic of sessions at Colorado's transit conferences and offer to provide similar sessions at conferences of human services organizations.  
Lead = Members of the current state interagency council and lead state coordination agency staff

#### Identifying and Addressing Barriers

The Framework for Action self-assessment tool, the Getting There Collaborative report, and council members all identified state-level barriers to coordination as a top priority. As one council member stated, "After the state sets an example and coordinates/consolidates from within, many of the problems identified among providers as barriers to coordination will be resolved."

12. Conduct a review of federal, state and local rules, regulations, practices and statutes to identify barriers to coordination and efficient provision of transportation services. Conduct an analysis of each major barrier.  
Lead = Each state agency member of the council
13. Establish state interagency working groups to review funding sources, application processes, eligibility requirements, measurements and definitions used for tracking and reporting the costs of transportation services, other policies, practices and laws to create a more efficient system of funding (avoiding "stove piping") and reimbursing services.  
Lead = Lead state coordination agency and each state agency member of the council
14. Take actions needed to address identified barriers, including removing barriers wherever possible and presenting recommended solutions to those policy makers with the authority to remove other barriers.  
Lead = State agency members of the council with support of interagency coordinating council